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Danish Seamen's Union Tells of Arms Shipments

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COPENHAGEN, Nov. 8 — A global watch on shipments of arms to the Persian Gulf indicated last spring that "many thousands of tons" in increased American-made weapons were quietly being sent to Iran, an executive of the Danish Seamen's Union said today.

"This was far beyond the normal shipments from arms dealers and smugglers, and I would say you cannot have those amounts being shipped without the government of the producing country being aware," Henrik Berlau, vice president of the union, asserted.

The union, which tries to track the use of merchant ships in international arms traffic, has no documentary proof of official American involvement, Mr. Berlau stressed. He conceded that private dealers, not governments, traditionally engage in the lucrative weapons trade.

But he maintained that governments are well aware of the traffic in today's volatile world. "If the United States does not know about all these shipments, they should be very worried," he said. "Governments know; they just look the other way."

Shipping Patterns

The weapons traffic and the purported role of the United States in clandestinely dealing in replacement parts with the Iranian Government has become a major controversy in recent days. The Danish union, which is concerned about its members' safety and is active in Danish politics of the left, says it has established a clear idea of the shipping patterns, although not of the purported governmental intrigues.

Mr. Berlau said that in daily checking of the union's five-year-old computer system used to monitor increasing Danish merchant traffic in arms, two changes became clear. One was the far larger shipments of American-made arms discernible since last spring, he contended, and the other was the opening of a direct route in weapons traffic from Israel to Iran last September.

He said his union had monitored close to a dozen shipments of more than 5,000 tons of weapons. He said these were tracked to Iran from the ports of Telamone in Italy, Piraeus in Greece and Eilat in Israel.

Of the shipments from Israel, Mr. Berlau said, "We didn't believe it at first, but it became clear." He added that nine such shipments had been reported by Danish merchant seamen aboard the ships and by union officials and sources in the ports.

Cargo Unloaded Last Week

One such ship, the Morsoe, unloaded 460 tons of military cargo from Israel in Bandra Abbas, Iran, last week, he said, adding that another such ship was enroute but he would not identify her lest the seamen aboard be endangered. Other ships plying the Israel-to-Iran arms trade, he said, were the Arktic, the Else TH and the Karen M.

In reporting the Eilat shipments, Mr. Berlau added, the Danish seamen said that Israeli officials took great pains to eliminate all traces of the originating port, even to transferring the crew's foodstuffs from containers bearing Israeli labels. The ships were also checked by securitymen who swam under the hulls, he reported.

Officials of the union, which has 5,500 members, said they were increasingly concerned about the arms traffic's danger to merchant seamen and the use of Danish-registered ships. As a result of a union complaint to the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Mr. Berlau said, "a Danish ship loaded with arms for Iran, the Maria TH, was turned back from her course Oct. 30 after rumors that Iraq was prepared to bomb her."

He said the union had pressed the Danish Government to prosecute 16 shippers in recent years and that Parliament was about to take up a proposal for tighter controls on the use of Danish merchant ships by arms dealers.

The typical practices of Iranian arms shippers, Mr. Berlau said, included having transport ships "hide out" for a week or two in the Red Sea to make surveillance more difficult. With laws nonexistent or laxly enforced, he continued, a shipper can easily bribe a functionary in some third-nation embassy for what is called an "end-user" certificate that disguises the true destination.